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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATE

1. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani local press, and has not been verified. The opinions expressed in this report, therefore, should not be interpreted by readers as conveying positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

- Aral Sea to be Filled With Water in the Coming Years
- Kazakhstan to Tighten Environment Law, Increase Fines
- U.S. Bans Beluga Caviar
- Ecology Minister Slams Oil Companies
- Mazhilis Approves Draft Law on Kazakhstan's Joining a Convention on Wetlands
- Mazhilis Approves Draft Law on Kazakhstan's Joining a Convention on Protecting the Caspian Sea
- Kazakhstan Discusses Ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, UN Convention On Climate Change
- International Agreement on the Balkhash Basin to be Developed in Kazakhstan
- Institute of Nuclear Physics Proposes to Transfer Part of SNTG Territory for Economic Use
- Brucellosis Included in the List of Especially Dangerous Animal Diseases
- HIV/AIDS Disease Incidents in Kazakhstan Increase by 20% Annually

Aral Sea To Be Filled With Water In The Coming Years

2. The Small Aral Sea separated from the Big Aral Sea by the Kok-Aral dam and will be filled with water in the next two to three years, Kazakhstan Vice-Premier Akhmetzhan Yesimov said at the second international forum "Balkhash-2005" in Almaty on September 30. The water would fill 360 sq km of area and would stretch almost 120 km to reach the town of Aralsk. The vice-premier underlined that the filling of Small Aral will favorably affect the development of the fishing industry in the region. The new dam is one of the main targets of the project on Regulation of the Syrdarya River and conservation of the northern part of Aral Sea implemented by Kazakhstan under the auspices of World Bank funding. The first stage of the project is estimated at \$85.79 mn, including \$64.5 mn from a loan extended by the World Bank. The remaining funds were provided by Kazakhstan (October 3, 2005).

Kazakhstan to Tighten Environment Law, Increase Fines

3. Kazakhstan's Ecology and Environment Ministry said Wednesday that in 2006 it plans to increase the fines to be paid by oil companies for environmental damage. Ecology and Environment Minister Aitkul Samakova said the new fines will be many times more than the current ones--about 500 million tenge (\$4 million)--and substantial enough to force companies to buy environmentally-friendly equipment. She said many large oil companies continue to illegally flare associate gas, despite fines (Dow Jones International News, October 5, 2005).

U.S. Bans Beluga Caviar

4. The U.S. ban on the import of beluga and beluga caviar produced in the Caspian Sea will not negatively affect Kazakhstani fish producers' operations, according to the news service of the AtyrauBalyk JSC in the Atyrau oblast. On September 30, the U.S. introduced a prohibition of beluga caviar and all beluga product imports produced in the Caspian Sea. The U.S. Wildlife Service stressed that the prohibition was motivated by an attempt to save the beluga sturgeon species. This species of fish has declined by 90% over the last 20 years, and is presently under the protection of a UN convention. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asked Caspian littoral states to respond by September 6 with measures that they will take to preserve beluga sturgeon. However, it has not received a reply from any of the Caspian countries (Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan) as of yet (Interfax-Kazakhstan, October 10, 2005).

Ecology Minister Slams Oil Companies

15. The RK Environment Protection Minister A. Samakova has criticized oil and gas companies operating in Kazakhstan for insufficient attention to ecological issues. She stressed that a "significant decrease" in the volume of investment for environmental protection has occurred at Tengizchevroil, KarakudukMunay, KarazhanbasMunay, KazakhTurkMunay and other companies. Samakova said that "gross violations" related to the control of radioactive material were found at the Great Wall LLP as well as at the KazMunayGas oil and gas company. The latter does not control its level of radiation due to

absence of monitoring equipment. The Minister also pointed out that submerged oil and gas wells in the Caspian zone provoke great concern and can cause complicated ecological situations. There are 85 submerged wells, which require the adoption of "urgent measures," she said. In addition, the minister stressed that oil companies should develop and implement programs for the utilization of associated gas, sulfur and other production wastes, and re-cultivate the soil (Interfax-Kazakhstan, October 10, 2005).

#### Mazhilis Approves Draft Law on Joining Wetlands Convention

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16. On September 28, at the plenary session of the Mazhilis, deputies approved Kazakhstan's joining of the Convention on the Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Wildlife Habitat. As the Mazhilis Committee on International Affairs, Defense and Security noted, three wetlands of Kazakhstan - Tengiz-Korgaldzhinskoye, Alakolskaya lake systems and at the juncture of the rivers Tengiz and Irgiz - are recognized as having international importance. The Convention on the Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Wildlife Habitat is an intergovernmental agreement signed in 1971 in Ramsar. It entered into force in 1975 (Gazeta, kz, September 28, 2005).

#### Mazhilis Approves Joining Caspian Sea Convention

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17. On September 28, at the plenary session of the Mazhilis, deputies approved Kazakhstan's joining of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea. According to the Committee on International Affairs, Defense and Security, the goal of signing this Convention is to develop cooperation in the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea from pollution, including protection, conservation, restoration and sustainable and rational use of its bioresources. The Convention was adopted in November 2003 in Tehran. It was signed by Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan. The bill is pending the Senate's consideration (Gazeta. kz, September 28, 2005).

#### Kyoto Protocol, UN Convention on Climate Change

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18. Vice Environment Protection Minister Zh. Bekzhanov and Director of the Coordination Center on Climate Change, K. Baigarin, discussed the issue of ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by Kazakhstan on September 27. Along with the developed countries, Kazakhstan has announced its intention to take quantitative obligations on reducing greenhouse emissions. An interagency commission determined that in the base year on greenhouse emissions, 1992, emissions totaled 340 million tons of CO-2 equivalent. Consequently, Kazakhstan informed Convention parties of its intention not to exceed 340 million tons of emissions during the first record session (Earthwire Kazakhstan, September 29, 2005).

#### International Agreement on the Balkhash Basin

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19. Minister of Environmental Protection A. Samakova announced on September 30 that the Ministry intends to develop an international Agreement on sustainable development and equal partnership of states located in the Lake Balkhash basin. The international agreement should be developed on the principles of the Helsinki Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Streams and International Lakes. The main problem is the quality of the water and the task is not to damage the ecosystem of the region and not to create the Second Aral, she noted at the briefing. (Kazakhstan Today, Sept 30, 2005)

#### INP Proposes Transfer of Part of SNTG Territory

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10. The Institute of Nuclear Physics, National Nuclear Center, proposed to transfer part of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site territory for economic use, noting that the land is clean. This was announced by the Director of the Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kairat Kadyrzhanov, at the

fifth international conference "Nuclear and Radiation Physics" held in Alatau settlement near Almaty on September 26. He also noted that there were territories that would be prohibited for use for decades and even hundreds of years. He hopes that if clean territories are transferred for use, the border of the test site will decrease and it will become easier to control the territory. However, U.S. scientists advised caution as economic activity may spread radioactive

pollution both within the territory of the test site and beyond its borders (Interfax-Kazakhstan, September 26, 2005).

#### Brucellosis Listed as Especially Dangerous Animal Disease

11. the Government of Kazakhstan introduced amendments to April 28, 2003 GOK Resolution No. 407 and added brucellosis to a list of especially dangerous diseases (Kazinform, September 26, 2005).

#### HIV/AIDS Increases by 20% Annually

12. According to the Second Report on the Millennium Development Goals in Kazakhstan, presented in Astana, cases of HIV/AIDS in Kazakhstan are increasing by 20% annually. According to the report, current legislation is rather controversial. On one hand, AIDS-infected people are protected, on the other hand they often face restrictions. Most infected people in Kazakhstan are poor and do not receive extra aid beyond the standard social protection. They are discriminated against and isolated. The document also says that nongovernmental organizations and the diseased themselves are not engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS properly (The Times of Central Asia, October 10, 2005).

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